

Jordan Diverted Arms To Iraq, Obey Charges

Details in Classified Report He Requested

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The State Department allowed shipments of U.S. military equipment to Jordan during the Persian Gulf War even though it was aware that some military assistance to Jordan was being diverted to Iraq, according to a senior Democratic legislator.

Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.), who chairs a House Appropriations subcommittee that handles foreign aid, said in a statement on the House floor late Thursday evening that he had learned about the diversion from a classified annex to a new General Accounting Office (GAO) report prepared at his request.

Obey said he could not provide details about the diversion of equipment to Iraq, because the administration had declined his request to declassify portions of the annex. But he said he had decided to disclose the report's conclusion because of what he claimed was a series of misstatements to Congress on the issue by the State Department.

In a separate but related complaint, the unclassified sections of the report provided by Obey to reporters yesterday said that the Bush administration falsely assured Congress that certain U.S. military aid to Jordan was halted during the year following Iraq's August 1990 occupation of Kuwait.

The report also said that administration officials mishandled or did not implement internal directives aimed at shutting off the aid to Jordan.

The report attributed the errors in part to a disagreement in the administration. "State Department officials believed that continuing assistance... was important because of [Jordan's] support of peace negotiations in the Middle East," the report said.

But other officials favored halting such assistance because Jordan's King Hussein opposed Western military action against Iraq, resulting in "competing policy objectives."

The GAO report detailed what it called "poor" implementation of three State Department directives regarding military sales and shipments to Jordan during the crisis. On Aug. 2, 1990, it stated, the department ordered a halt to approval of new military sales.

But over the next two months, the administration approved 12 sales of such items as ammunition and antitank missile components, the report said.

A second State Department directive on Feb. 6, 1991, suspended all existing arms shipments to Jordan. But over the next month, more than 700 items of military equipment worth \$550,000 were transferred to a freight forwarder employed by Jordan. The forwarder, not named in the report, and officials of the U.S. Customs Service claimed that all the articles were warehoused.

The GAO said, however, that shipping documents provided by the forwarder to support this claim "show some date alterations and appear incomplete." It added that "we cannot be sure whether or not we were provided with all of the relevant shipping documents."

The report noted that the forwarder was never officially notified

of the Feb. 6 order until March 4, three days before the suspension was partially lifted, because the Defense and State departments could not agree on wording of the order.

It said further that a State Department decision at that point to maintain an embargo on shipments of such items as chemical masks, antiaircraft missiles and other ammunition-related items evidently was disregarded by the Defense Department, which authorized many such shipments before the lifting of all controls in October 1991.

On the subject of the diversion of military equipment to Iraq, a State Department official, who declined to be identified, said in response to the report that "we have no confirmed information of military parts or equipment moving from Jordan to Iraq during the Gulf crisis." He also said he did not believe any of the arms provided to the freight forwarder were sent to Jordan during the war, which ended Feb. 28, 1991.

Other government documents show that the Bush administration rejected a proposal by the undersecretary of commerce for export administration to restrict general exports to Jordan of computers and other military-related items in January 1991, because it would jeopardize what one called "more important diplomatic initiatives" with Jordan.